

## GALATIANS PART 16

GAL. 4.21-26

This morning, we continue our study of Paul's letter to the churches of Galatia. In chapter 4 of this book of the NT, Paul continues his explanation and defense of the gospel of grace as opposed to those who promote salvation by works or by keeping the Law.

Last week, Paul interrupted his appeal to history, reason, and logic with an emotional appeal to the people of Galatia to remember the love relationship that developed between them and Paul while he was in their midst.

He is frustrated and angered by this sudden and radical change in their attitude toward him and the gospel message he preached among them.

In what I believe was an honest desire to please God and to gain righteousness, the members of the churches of Galatia allowed these false teachers to convince them that the faith of Jesus Christ was not enough to gain salvation – that grace was not enough. They also had to obey the Law.

In other words, to be saved, you must first become a Jew and be circumcised.

In today's text, Paul once again returns to a look into history to make his case concerning the gospel of grace.

### Verse 21

For those who insist that your doctrine is correct and that mine is wrong...

- Do you understand the ramifications of persisting in your belief?

- Do you know what waits in store for those who reject or add to the gospel of grace?

These questions are in large part rhetorical questions. Paul has already spent two chapters of this letter answering those questions.

All that remains after one has rejected the salvation of God in Christ alone by grace alone through faith alone is the penalty, the burden, and the curse of the Law.

### Verse 22

Let me take you back into Jewish history – back to a time before the Law was given – all the way back to the beginning of the nation of Israel.

God made a promise to Abraham that he would have a son who would become the father of a great nation which would be a blessing to all of the nation of the earth. God specifically promised Abraham that he would have this son with his wife, Sarah (Gen. 17.15).

Ten years passed by with no sign of a son, let alone a nation.

Either because she was unwilling to wait on God or because she thought she could make God's will come to fruition faster, Sarah proposed that Abraham bear a son by her female Egyptian servant girl named Hagar.

You can read the story in its detail in Genesis 16, 17, & 21.

### Verse 23

Hagar did have a son by Abraham. His name was Ishmael.

Speaking to Hagar concerning Ishmael, God said...

Gen. 16:12 He shall be a wild donkey of a man, his hand against everyone and everyone's hand against him, and he shall dwell

over against all his kinsmen (he will live at odds with all his brothers).”

In Genesis 17, God repeated His promise that Abraham would have a son by his wife, Sarah.

Still struggling with how a 100 year old man and a 90+ year old woman could give birth to a child, Abraham asked God if Ishmael – now about 14 years old – might be the answer to God’s promise of a son.

But God reassured Abraham that Ishmael was not the son of promise. That son would come, not from a slave woman, but from the woman who was his wife – Sarah.

God promised that Ishmael would become the father of 12 sons and of a great nation. In fact, Ishmael became the progenitor of the Arabs out of whom came the religion of Islam.

This son of a slave woman was “born according to the flesh.”

This is not a reference to

- a physical action that would lead to pregnancy or
- to the desire on the part of Abraham to have an intimate relationship with a woman other than his wife.

It is a reference to the motivation that man must act so that God can act.

The phrase “according to the flesh” here refers to the belief that the only way for the promises of God to be activated is for man to take an active part in God’s plan.

I am sure that all of you have heard phrases like...

- “God helps those who help themselves.”
- “Do your best; God will do the rest.”
- “If you’ll just take that first step, God will take all the rest of the steps for you.”

While such sayings are intended to be motivational, they are not Scriptural.

James A. Fowler

Abraham acted "according to the flesh" when he listened to his wife instead of God, and chose what W. Ian Thomas has called "the reasonable alternative to faith," by thinking that he could perform and enact what could only be accomplished by God in fulfillment of His own promise.

Verse 23 says, “The son of the slave was born according to the flesh, while the son of the free woman was born through promise.”

What Abraham and Sarah would come to know – what Paul wanted these Galatians to learn – and what we must also realize is that the conception and birth of Isaac had nothing to with either Abraham or Sarah.

Yes, the conception came as a natural result of the intimate relationship between husband and wife, but even that was the result of the work of God in their lives.

Gen. 18:11 Abraham and Sarah were already old and well advanced in years (Abraham was 99 years old), and Sarah was past the age of childbearing.

Rom. 4:19 He (Abraham) did not weaken in faith when he considered his own body, which was as good as dead (since he was about a hundred years old), or when he considered the barrenness of Sarah’s womb.

Abraham and Sarah did not have a son because they chose to have one, but because God intended for them to have a son.

They did not ask God for a son. They did not invite God to work a miracle in their lives. And if you will notice, God did not ask Abraham and Sarah if He could give them a son.

The end of verse 23 says, “...the son of the free woman was born through promise.”

Everything related to the conception and birth of Isaac was the result of the sovereign will of God and happened as the result of His miraculous work. It was His decision. He transformed a dead womb into a life-giving source of blessing.

“God’s promises can only be enacted by His own activity,” not man’s activity plus God’s. (Fowler)

### **Verse 24a**

Now Paul takes this story from the annals of Jewish history and uses it as an allegory to make his point concerning the gospel of grace.

He will not explain the original meaning behind the text as it was recorded in Genesis, but will “read between the lines” in order to discern a deeper meaning in the story of Sarah and Hagar, of Isaac and Ishmael, related to the conflict between Law and grace.

In a sense, he spiritualizes an historical event to drive home the point that he has been trying to make throughout chapters 3 & 4 – that the only true children of Abraham are those who have come to Christ by faith, not by works.

“God’s work done God’s way by God’s grace is the only way that God is glorified in His creation.” (Fowler)

Each of the women in this story of Sarah and Hagar represent the conflict between two covenants: the covenant of the Law given at Mt. Sinai, and the covenant of grace that came by way of Mt. Zion.

### **Verse 24b-25**

Hagar bears children, not for freedom, but for slavery.

The laws of slavery stated that a child continued in the condition of his mother. If the mother was a free woman, then the child would be free. If the woman was a slave, then the child would remain as a slave, regardless of the status of the father.

Hagar was a slave; therefore, Ishmael was also a slave. Unless he was set free by his master, Ishmael would always be a slave. And so would his descendants.

Hagar represents Mt. Sinai, the earthly intersection between God and Moses – where God delivered to Moses His hand-written code, engraved into two tablets of stone – the origin of the Law of Moses.

Look back with me just a moment to...

Gal. 3:23 Now before faith came, we were held captive under the law, imprisoned until the coming faith would be revealed.

Remember that Paul had earlier taught that the Law was as a prison guard or a prison, holding those who were confined to its limits as virtual slaves.

The Law was like the guardian of a child born to parents with great wealth. This guardian – this steward – had complete power over the child’s person as well as his property. Under such conditions, the child was no more than a slave.

That was the condition of the Jews under the Law.

Before they became Christians, these Galatian believers were slaves to the pagan gods they worshipped. Paul told them that to give in to these false teachers and bow to the demands of the Law was equivalent to their returning to the worship of those false gods and continue in the slavery of paganism.

Furthermore, Hagar represented the earthly city of Jerusalem as it was in the day when Paul wrote this letter to the Galatians.

Jerusalem was the center of the Jewish religion and thus the city that most represented the Law – including the bondage and the curse of the Law.

The earthly Jerusalem, represented by the slave woman, was the center of authority for those who yielded themselves to live under the Law.

**Verse 26**

Just as Hagar's offspring would be slaves because she was a slave, so the offspring of Sarah would be free, even as she was free.

Sarah represented the heavenly Jerusalem – the true source of grace and the freedom found only in Christ – and is “the mother of us all,” meaning the mother of all who have been saved by grace.

While Hagar represented Mt. Sinai and the slavery of the Law, Sarah represented Mt. Zion and the grace of God.

The contrast between the two can best be seen in...

Hebrews 12.18-24

The Jews took great pride in being able to trace their heritage and the founding of their nation and the call of God on the nation to Abraham.

Yet there is one thing that both Isaac, the father of the Jews, and Ishmael, the founder of the Arabs, have in common – both can trace their ancestry back to Abraham.

And, in fact, both claim that they are the ones who are the rightful heirs of the promise.

So Paul brings to into play another question. Not who is your father, but who is your mother?

On the one hand, there is Hagar, the slave woman, and the mother of Ishmael – representative of Mt. Sinai, the earthly Jerusalem, the Law of Moses, and the slavery and the curse that accompanies it.

Then there is Sarah, the wife of Abraham and the mother of Isaac – representing Mt. Zion, the heavenly Jerusalem, the grace of God, and the freedom found in the faith of Jesus Christ, who is the true Son of promise.

The first, Hagar, says that you must earn the righteousness that leads to salvation by obeying the Law – by being a good and moral person so that God will see you as worthy of redeeming.

On the other hand is Sarah, blessed by the miraculous touch of God, bearing the son of promise, not by her own design or desires, but by the perfect will of sovereign God.

The gospel of grace says that all have sinned and come short of the glory of God.

No man seeks after God of his own desire.

The only way we can come to God and to be reconciled to Him is through the salvation which comes by grace through the faith of Jesus Christ.

Heb. 12:25 See that you do not refuse him who is speaking. For if they did not escape when they refused him who warned them on earth, much less will we escape if we reject him who warns from heaven.